

T H E B E S T O F

CAMEO



V O L U M E 2

THE BEST OF
CAMEO
VOLUME 2



1. **DON'T BE SO COOL** *featuring Nona Hendryx* (4:12)
2. **I WANT IT NOW** (4:29)
3. **IN THE NIGHT** *featuring Miles Davis* (4:40)
4. **WE'RE GOING OUT TONIGHT** (4:39)
5. **WHY HAVE I LOST YOU** (5:14)
6. **HANGIN' DOWNTOWN** (5:06)
7. **IT'S SERIOUS** (8:07)
8. **FREAKY DANCIN'** (5:20)
9. **KEEP IT HOT** (4:41)
10. **BE YOURSELF** (4:07)
11. **ALLIGATOR WOMAN** (3:49)
12. **INSANE** (4:56)
13. **WE ALL KNOW WHO WE ARE** (5:51)
14. **FEEL ME** (6:09)
15. **YOUR LOVE TAKES ME OUT** (6:39)

ALL SONGS PROUCED BY LARRY BLACKMON



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THE BEST OF CAMEO VOLUME 2

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THE BEST OF CAMEO VOLUME 2



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GET 'EM ALL



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we all know who we are

by Tony Green



A funky lifestyle or funky music is one that favors direct expression over regimentation, gentle direction over micromanagement. That's the popular image of funk: bohemianism transferred into sound waves.

Like many popular images, it's only half right. Sure, artists like George Clinton showed that loose reins can produce great music, culling slamming jams from hours in the studio and on stage. On the other hand, there are the more martial funksters, like James Brown or Prince, who have used discipline to achieve similar, if not equal results.

Cameo, led by Juilliard-trained brain trust Larry Blackmon, was one of the latter. After starting out in 1975 as the New York City Players, they moved into the vanguard of the second wave of the funk invasion, following the Parliament-Funkadelic/Sly/War/Ohio Players era. And it was the group's hyper-tight, militaristic style that set them apart from contemporaries like the Gap Band, who developed a signature sound around rubbery, synthesized bass lines, a stylistic touch pioneered by P-Funk keyboardist Bernie Worrell.

Cameo made its reputation with muscular, multi-layered grooves that swung with the precision of a Swiss watch. While other groups sometimes took a hit-and-

miss attitude toward the funk, Cameo could always be counted on to make your neck roll with tracks as tight and impenetrable as armor plate. It was this consistency, as well as a keen ear for pop trends, that made the group one of the most successful of the roiling post P-Funk years. (And, they were signed to Parliament's Chocolate City/Casablanca label by Cecil Holmes, who named the group as a good luck charm after his former label, Cameo/Parkway.)

Cameo was originally a good-time party band with a full-bodied, old school funk sound. The eight-minute dance jam, "It's Serious," with its live-in-the-studio chants, Kool-styled horn bleats and jazzy keyboards, was a *trés* Seventies track. So was "Insane," with a chattering, James Brown guitar riff and a P-Funk influenced bass line.

But as the times and tastes changed so did Cameo's music. The Eighties were an angular decade, a time of asymmetrical hair styles and hard-edged political policies. Quirky, pinched rhythms and





sanitized tracks were signs of pop music's increasing love affair with the synthesizer. Even ol' dirt-dog Texas boys like ZZ Top were, by the middle of the decade, loading their releases with walls of processed sound. Among Cameo's core black audience, the Eighties love for form expressed itself in the reassertion of the "black elegance" aesthetic, one lampooned by many funksters (and by Cameo themselves, in their 1981 track "Don't Be So Cool"). If the Sixties were the soul era, the Seventies the funk era, then the Eighties were, for a while, the "bourgie" era. When Prince's "Purple Rain" hit movie theaters in 1984, it was the super-clean Morris Day, not Prince, who got the most props from black youth.

So when Cameo stripped down from 13 members to nine for their 1980 album *Cameosis* (they would eventually pare down to three) it was a sign of the times. Cameo's triumphs from then on lay in its ability to remain funky in what was becoming an increasingly unfunky era, acting as a musical conscience for a mainstream black pop world seemingly obsessed with crossover. On one hand, they could craft ballads with the best of them—"Why Have I Lost You," for example, sung by the late Wayne Cooper. On the other, Blackmon and Co. took the trappings of the gloss-funk era, and pumped it with sly slightly debauched humor and a lurking sense of menace. Their stuttering vocals and popcorn rhythms were a perfect sound track for the schizoid Eighties urban lifestyle.

Alligator Woman, released in 1982, was a declaration of what was to be the Eighties Cameo sound. That album was completed after the group relocated to Atlanta, predating the current R&B industry resurgence in that town. "Be Yourself" could have been addressed to the legions of watered down smoothies that populated the airwaves around that time. Lines like "Why do you think you have to take/all that the people say and do?" spoke to an individualism out of character with the lockstep conservatism of the Reagan years. Even if you didn't check the words, the groove made its intentions clear. Meticulously crafted, interlocking rhythm parts, stop-start harmony vocals and one of the deadliest basslines of the post-Larry Graham era, make "Be Yourself" a timeless jam.

Cameo wasn't just tuned into urban sounds, though. The New Wave movement was making dancefloor inroads, its quirky, synth-driven dance pop often bearing a surprising resemblance to Cameo's own material. The title track from *Alligator Woman* is worthy of any skinny-tie party. With its chopping guitar riff and nasally keyboards, the song was a textbook example of pop assimilation, owing as much, if not more, to the B-52s and Talking Heads than it did to JB.

Cameo continued to crank out their particular brand of offbeat pop-funk through the decade. *She's Strange* featured not only the title song and "Talkin' Out of the Side of Your Neck" (included on the first Cameo *Best Of* collection), it boasted the sly ballad "Hangin' Downtown." But while the *Word Up* album was arguably the apex of Cameo's Eighties path, the very stylistic earmarks that made them unique—bullfrog vocals, automated beats—were lapsing into cliché.

The group lost steam, but it wasn't all their doing. Rap had taken funk to another level, leaving even as formidable a polystylist as Prince slightly puzzled. And the group's rock-funk leanings seemed tame next to over-the-top eclectics like Living Colour, Bad Brains and Fishbone.

They were still capable of putting together solid tracks, though. The Miles Davis duet "In The Night," released in 1987, showed Blackmon's ability to assimilate the varnished jazz-funk of the legendary trumpeter's late Eighties albums. The 1990 hit, "I Want It Now," featured all the familiar Cameo signatures, including a salacious video that earned heavy rotation. But by that time, they had long since made their mark. Cameo was—and still is, if you've checked them live—capable of bringing the funk like few others.



TONY GREEN is the music writer for the Florida Times-Union in Jacksonville. He has also written for *Musician*, *JazzTimes*, *Jazziz*, *Request*, *Option*, *Guitar Player* and *Guitar World*.

CAMEO

LARRY BLACKMON - lead & background vocals
NATHAN LEFTENANT - background vocals, trumpet
TOMI JENKINS - lead & background vocals
JERYL BRIGHT - trombone, background vocals
ARNETT LEFTENANT - tenor saxophone, background vocals
THOMAS "TC" CAMPBELL - keyboards
GREGORY JOHNSON - Fender Rhodes, Moog, background vocals
ANTHONY LOCKETT - guitars, lead & background vocals
CHARLIE SINGLETON - guitars, lead & background vocals
ERIC DURHAM - guitar
AARON MILLS - bass guitar, background vocals
GARY DOW - bass guitar
WILLIAM REVIS - bass guitar
WAYNE COOPER - lead & background vocals
STEPHEN MOORE - lead & background vocals
KURT JETER - vocals

Additional musicians and singers:

RANDY BRECKER - trumpet
CLIFFORD ADAMS - trombone
MICHAEL BRECKER - saxophone
MELVIN WELLS - saxophone
ROD ANTOON - keyboards
KENNI HAIRSTON - keyboards
BERNARD WRIGHT - keyboards
KEVIN KENDRICKS - keyboards, synthesizers
ROBERT SMITH - keyboards & programming
BILLY ALLEN - keyboards & programming
MICHAEL BURNETT - bass guitar
WILLIAM MORRIS - lead & background vocals
SMOOVE & KONDUKO - scratches

1. DON'T BE SO COOL (4:12)

(Larry Blackmon/Aaron Mills)

Better Nights Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)/

Better Days Music admin. by Songs of PolyGram International, Inc. (BMI)

Featuring NONA HENDRYX

From *Knights Of The Sound Table* (1981)

2. I WANT IT NOW (4:29)

(Larry Blackmon/Billy Allen/Robert Smith)

Better Nights Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)

From *Real Men...Wear Black* (1990)

3. IN THE NIGHT (4:40)

(Larry Blackmon/Mervyn DePayer)

All Seeing Eye Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)/

Better Days Music admin. by Songs of PolyGram International, Inc. (BMI)

Featuring MILES DAVIS

From *Machismo* (1988)

4. WE'RE GOING OUT TONIGHT (4:39)

(Larry Blackmon/Tomi Jenkins/Nathan Leftenant)

Better Nights Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)/

Better Days Music admin. by Songs of PolyGram International, Inc. (BMI)

From *Cameosis* (1980)

#11 R&B

5. WHY HAVE I LOST YOU (5:14)

(Larry Blackmon)

Better Nights Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)

From *Cameosis* (1980)

6. HANGIN' DOWNTOWN (5:06)

(Kenny Hairston)

Cameo-Five Music adm. by Songs of PolyGram International, Inc. (BMI)/

Deronde Jay Music admin. by Zomba Songs, Inc. (BMI)/

Zomba Songs, Inc. (BMI)

Arranged by Larry Blackmon and Charlie Singleton

Hom Arrangements by Larry Blackmon, Nathan Leftenant and Melvin Wells

From *She's Strange* (1984)

7. IT'S SERIOUS (8:07)

(Gregory Johnson/Larry Blackmon)

Better Days Music admin. by Songs of PolyGram International, Inc. (BMI)

From *We All Know Who We Are* (1977)

#21 R&B

8. FREAKY DANCIN' (5:20)

(Larry Blackmon/Tomi Jenkins)

Better Nights Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)/

Better Days Music admin. by Songs of PolyGram International, Inc. (BMI)

From *Knights Of The Sound Table* (1981)

#3 R&B, #102 Pop

9. KEEP IT HOT (4:41)

(Larry Blackmon/Anthony Lockett)

Better Nights Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)/

Better Days Music admin. by Songs of PolyGram International, Inc. (BMI)

From *Feel Me* (1980)

#4 R&B

10. BE YOURSELF (4:07)

(Charlie Singleton/Larry Blackmon/Tomi Jenkins)

All Seeing Eye Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)/

Cameo-Five Music adm. by Songs of PolyGram International, Inc. (BMI)

From *Alligator Woman* (1982)

#12 R&B, #101 Pop

11. ALLIGATOR WOMAN (3:49)

(Larry Blackmon/Tomi Jenkins/Charlie Singleton)

All Seeing Eye Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)/

Cameo-Five Music adm. by Songs of PolyGram International, Inc. (BMI)

From *Alligator Woman* (1982)

#54 R&B

12. INSANE (4:56)

(Larry Blackmon)

Better Days Music admin. by Songs of PolyGram International, Inc. (BMI)

From *Ugly Ego* (1978)

#17 R&B

13. WE ALL KNOW WHO WE ARE (5:51)

(Larry Blackmon)

Better Nights Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)

From *We All Know Who We Are* (1977)

14. FEEL ME (6:08)

(Larry Blackmon/Anthony Lockett)

Better Nights Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)/

Better Days Music admin. by Songs of PolyGram International, Inc. (BMI)

From *Feel Me* (1980)

#27 R&B

15. YOUR LOVE TAKES ME OUT (6:39)

(Larry Blackmon)

Better Nights Music admin. by PolyGram International Publishing, Inc. (ASCAP)

From *Feel Me* (1980)

ALL SONGS PRODUCED BY LARRY BLACKMON

Billboard chart positions courtesy of Joel Whitburn's Record Research Inc.

Compilation Produced by Harry Weinger and Donald Cleveland

Executive Producer: Bill Levenson

Essay by Tony Green

Digitally remastered by Gary N. Mayo at PolyGram Studios

Package Design by SMAY VISION

Cover photograph and photographs pp.2,4,6-7 courtesy of

Michael Ochs Archives

Back cover photograph by Paul Rider/Retna Ltd.

Photograph p.5 by Anastasia Pansios/LFI

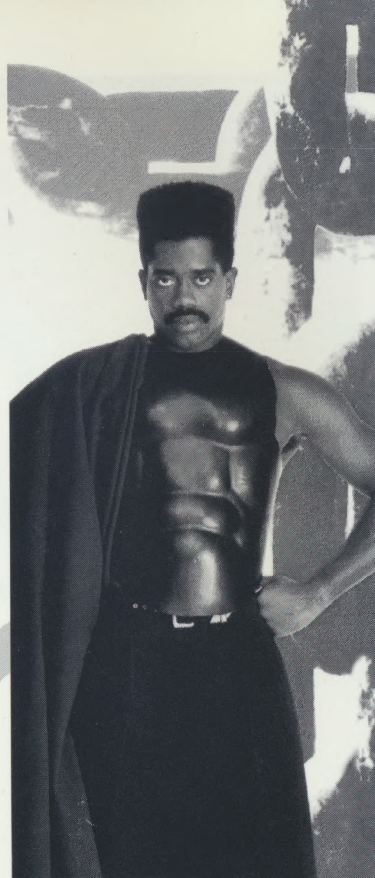
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Project Assistance: Catherine Ladis

DEDICATION: FUNK LAB - GARY, RAY, MITCH (east coast luke), AL,

GREG, RANDY, KENNY.... we all know who WE are.

Thanks to Jerry Rappaport





THE BEST OF

CAMEO

VOLUME 2

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